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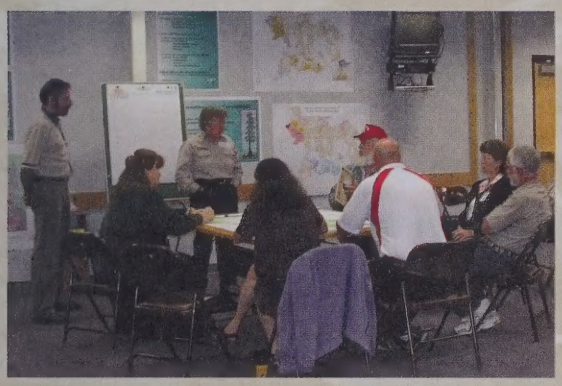
WESTERN OREGON PLAN REVISIONS

WESTERN OREGON PLAN REVISIONS NEWS

NEWSLETTER ISSUE NO. 3 FEBRUARY 2006

BLM
Salem, Eugene, Roseburg, Coos Bay, Medford, and Klamath Falls Offices

Scoping Report Released



In September and October we asked for the public's help in identifying issues that should be addressed in the western Oregon plan revisions. The comments expressed by the public covered a wide variety of attitudes and ideas about past and future management of BLM-administered lands in western Oregon. A summary of those comments and the scoping process is published in a Scoping Report available this month. Many comments centered around the following issues:

- Preserve old-growth stands and focus harvest on small-diameter trees.
- Provide for community economic stability, but look at a wider spectrum of resource values and diverse sources of direct and indirect revenue that can be generated from O&C lands.
- Strive for "species recovery" over merely "avoiding jeopardy."
- Maintain the reserve system as it now exists.
- Maintain or increase the harvest to support timber-dependent industries and communities.
- Maintain and improve water quality.
- A need for management to reduce the increasing wildfire hazard.

Several management alternatives suggested by groups or individuals were reviewed by the planning team.

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Welcome...

to the third issue of the Bureau of Land Management's Western Oregon Plan Revisions Newsletter. In this issue you'll find summaries of two important documents that have recently been released: the Scoping Report and a document titled "Planning Criteria and State Director Guidance." These documents provide important information about the progress of the plan revisions.

Internet Website NEW

We're pleased to announce a new "home" for our Internet Home Page. You can find more detailed information at: http://www.blm.gov/or/plans/wopr. Major planning documents and background information are now included on the website. If you can't find an answer to your questions here, we're always open to questions and comments. You can contact the planning staff at (503) 808-6629 or e-mail us at: orwopr@or.blm.gov.

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Other substantive comments included:

- Differing interpretations of the O&C Act and questions about the effect of the plan revisions on the Northwest Forest Plan were expressed.
- Suggestions that BLM consider existing cooperative relationships with partners, watershed councils, advisory groups, communities, and neighboring landowners.
- Concerns about the RMP revision process and how BLM was complying with National Environmental Policy Act requirements.
- Suggestions to maintain Adaptive Management Areas and fully implement their intent for innovation and testing.
- Needs were expressed to maintain existing Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and to designate new areas (including some areas without roads.)

In addition to summarizing and reporting on the comments received, the Scoping Report also contains responses to many questions asked by commenters and a definition and explanation of some of the terms used. A discussion is included about how BLM will interpret the O&C Act and a summary of the court history that interprets that Act. While it is BLM's position that timber management (including cut and removal) is the dominant use of the O&C and Coos Bay Wagon Road lands in western Oregon, that dominant use must be implemented in full compliance of not only the O&C Act, but also a number of subsequent laws. These laws include the Endangered Species Act, Clean Air Act, and Clean Water Act.

A copy of the scoping report can be found on the web at: http://www.blm.gov/or/plans/wopr or by contacting the Western Oregon Plan Revisions office in Portland or any BLM office in western Oregon.

Planning Criteria and State Director Guidance

This document is now available for review and comment. The purpose of the document is to guide development of the plan revisions (particularly the alternatives and analysis of their effects), ensure the analysis is tailored to the issues, and focus data collection. The BLM is asking for comments by March 17, 2006.

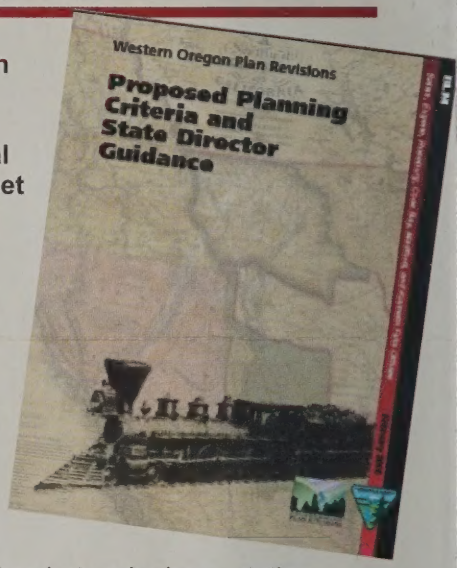
Chapter 1 contains an overview of the planning effort. It describes the statutory basis for management, the planning area, the planning process, as well as the vision and goals for the planning effort.

Chapter 2 contains guidance on formulation of alternatives. Key to this chapter is an outline of the conceptual alternatives proposed to be analyzed in the EIS.

The alternative section begins with a discussion of the O&C Act of 1937 and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 that guide BLM's management of lands within the planning area. This section also addresses BLM's interpretation of the O&C Act and clearly states how this act will be applied, briefly describing court rulings that provide the basis for this guidance.

Chapter 2 continues with a discussion of the strategy used to develop a range of alternatives and describes the preliminary alternatives identified. In very general terms, those alternatives are:

- **No Action –** Existing Resource Management Plans.
- **Revised Northwest Forest Plan** with a particular focus on a different riparian reserve strategy. Maintain current land use allocations. Examine alternative aquatic strategy. Revise guidance for other land use allocations based on lessons learned.



- **Management based on land use allocations with static reserves established to minimal levels sufficient to meet legal requirements.** Maintain sufficient suitable habitat within critical habitat for listed species. High timber yields on lands within harvest land base.
- **Minimize land use allocations and manage under an extended rotation.** Manage entire land base for timber production, but under long rotation, ensuring appropriate percentage of BLM-lands are in late-successional habitat at any one time to address species conservation goals.
- **Situational Management.** Minimal land use allocations. Variable management direction across landscape based on such factors as watershed conditions, percent of BLM ownership, presence of critical habitat, and special status species.

During public scoping we heard many suggestions to concentrate timber harvest on thinning younger stands and cease the logging of old-growth stands. Some suggested ceasing all logging on public lands. Stopping all logging on O&C lands would clearly be a violation of the O&C Lands Act of 1937, so it would not be a reasonable alternative. However, the concept of restricting harvest to thinning young stands or ceasing the harvest of old-growth timber will be analyzed within several of the alternatives described above. This will be done through "sub-alternatives" and "sensitivity analysis." For example, under the second alternative above (Revised Northwest Forest Plan), we would analyze a sub-alternative that would prescribe thinning only with

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no regeneration harvest. To demonstrate the effects of reserving old-growth timber, we would also vary these alternatives through a "sensitivity analysis" that would show the effects of reserving all stands greater than a certain age such as 80, 120, or 200-years old.

More detail on each of these alternatives is contained in the planning criteria document. These alternatives are "preliminary" and may be modified as details are developed over the next few months.

The second chapter also contains a substantial list of actions that will be included in all alternatives and describes the framework BLM will use to incorporate new and existing science into the analysis.

The information in Chapter 3 will guide the analysis of the environmental effects of each alternative. There is an overview of vegetative modeling that plays a major role in the planning process, followed by sections on each of the resources and programs (timber, wildlife, fisheries, recreation, grazing, fire and fuels, etc.). Each resource section presents analytical assumptions, analytical methods and techniques that will be used, data needs, data display methods, questions for scientists, and reference sources.

The document continues with chapters describing consistency with other agency plans and programs, as well as guidance for using the completed Resource Management Plans.

Copies of the "Planning Criteria and State Director Guidance" document can be obtained from any BLM office in western Oregon. You can request a paper or electronic copy (CD) by contacting the project office at: Western Oregon Plan Revisions, P. O. Box 2965, Portland, OR 97208, (503) 808-6629, or e-mail: orwopr@or.blm.gov. An electronic version of the document is also posted on the web at: <http://www.blm.gov/or/plans/wopr>.

Future Opportunities for Public Involvement

The BLM will host six public workshops in western Oregon to discuss the range of alternatives considered in the revisions. According to Dick Prather, Planning Team Leader, "The purpose of these meetings is not to debate or gather opinions about which alternative is better than another. The purpose of these meetings is to assure that we have a reasonable range of management alternatives as we begin the environmental impact statement (EIS) process. We want to be sure that people with ideas about future BLM management can see their ideas fitting somewhere in the alternatives. After we understand the impacts of the various alternatives through the preparation of the EIS, we'll be ready to discuss which alternative or combination of alternatives will best guide future management."

These meetings are open to the public. All meetings will start at 7:00 p.m. and last about an hour and a half.

- Monday, March 6, BLM Office, Eugene, 2890 Chad Drive
- Tuesday, March 7, BLM Office, North Bend, 1300 Airport Lane
- Wednesday, March 8, BLM Office, Roseburg, 777 NW Garden Valley Blvd.
- Thursday, March 9, BLM/Forest Service Interagency Office, Grants Pass, 2164 N.E. Spalding Ave.
- Monday, March 13, BLM Office, Salem, 1717 Fabry Rd. SE
- Tuesday, March 14, BLM Office, Klamath Falls, 2795 Anderson Ave., Building #25

Where are we in the plan revisions process?

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ACEC Nomination Results

Last fall the public was given the opportunity to nominate potential Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) for consideration in the plan revisions process. Nominations were due December 2, 2005. Nominations were received for 81 new ACECs.

BLM staff evaluated these nominations and the 99 existing ACECs in the planning area to determine which areas meet the minimum criteria for "relevance and importance" for further consideration in the plan revisions. After review by the six districts, 91 of the existing ACECs and 33 of the nominated ACECs were recommended for further consideration. These 124 potential ACECs involve approximately 102,000 acres or about four percent of the planning area. More detail about each of the potential ACECs can be found on the project website at: <http://www.blm.gov/or/plans/wopr>.

Existing and potential ACECs that meet "relevance and importance" criteria and need special management will be considered in the development of each management plan alternative. The special management needs of each area will be compared with the prescribed management under each planning alternative. It is quite likely that some potential ACECs may be proposed for designation under one alternative, but designation will not be needed under another alternative.

For example, if a potential ACEC was nominated to provide special management attention for a unique ecosystem, and that area occurs within a broader area that would receive the same kind of management under one of the management alternatives, that ACEC would not be necessary. However, under another planning alternative, special management attention may be necessary because the surrounding area would not receive the same type of management.

Final designation of ACEC status will occur after the final Environmental Impact Statement is approved and a formal decision is made for each revised Resource Management Plan. This should occur early in 2008.

What is an ACEC? *To be designated as an ACEC, an area must require special management attention to protect its important and relevant values. Special management attention refers to management prescriptions developed expressly to protect the important and relevant values of an area from potential effects of actions otherwise permitted by the Resource Management Plan. These are management measures that would not be necessary if the relevant and important features were not present. Special management attention should be unique to the area involved and include terms and conditions specifically to protect the important and relevant values occurring in that area.*

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